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"The Preservation of the States United :"

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN

HARVARD CHURCH, CHARLESTOWN,

ON THANKSGIVING DAY, NOV. 29, 1860.

BY GEORGE E. ELLIS.

CHARLESTOWN :

ABRAM E. CUTTER.

1860.

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DISCOURSE.

PSALM lxxx. 14, 15.

"RETURN, WE BESEECH THEE, O GOD OF HOSTS! LOOK DOWN FROM HEAVEN,
AND BEHOLD, AND VISIT THIS VINE; AND THE VINEYARD WHICH THY
RIGHT HAND HATH PLANTED."

THAT devout supplication which we make to-day for our land, as the Psalmist made it for his, is an utterance of gratitude, thanksgiving, and trust. It blesses for the past, and asks blessings for the future.

Among the subjects which the proclamation of our chief magistrate sets before us for our thanksgiving and prayer to-day, it puts foremost this,—“the preservation of the States united.” If we heeded the threats of some in one part of this Union, and the forebodings of others in another part of it, we might have our fears lest this might be the last Thanksgiving Day on which we should enjoy that blessing. We live in times and amidst events in which it is equally difficult and unwise to utter prophecies, whether they be suggested by the threats of some or the fears of others. We will venture upon no prophecies, save only those which our hopes and wishes shall fashion for us when we realize anew the precious blessings of peace

and union. Those blessings are too vast and dear, and are shared in by too many, and are guarded by too many securities, to be put at easy risk. Passion and bitterness and reckless rage and grievous misunderstandings between brethren seem to threaten them for the moment. But the voice of wisdom may yet be heard; words of reconciliation and terms of peace are yet to be offered; and, if these fail, there is the strong arm of lawful and righteous power, which may prevent violence without using violence.

Let us find an appropriate lesson for the day in the aspects of public affairs among us, as they show us the need of wisdom and moderation and kindness in all classes of our citizens, especially in those who represent the antagonisms of party strife. Doubtless we have trouble before us. It has been so long threatening us, that it has become familiar. An issue presents itself to us in our national politics, which must sooner or later have arisen in our land, and which comes before us just now, perhaps, under far more favorable circumstances, and of really less formidable aspect, than, a few years ago, we could have ventured to have hoped. While every other civilized nation on the earth has darker clouds hovering over its future fortunes than any which as yet we can see in our horizon, we could hardly have expected that Providence would wholly spare us those anxieties and conflicts by which nations, as well as individuals, hold their earthly inheritance.

Our own land has already settled, by precedent and experience, some of the most difficult problems

of government, on which partial issues had arisen in former ages in the Old World. As imperfectly struggled with then and there, most direful wars and conflicts have again and again attended them. They have always, elsewhere, been arrested before reaching a final solution; and have left popular liberty either under the control of re-established despotism, or grudgingly recognized by incomplete constitutional sanctions. It remains to be proved here, whether we are wise and strong enough to dispose of another issue which has arisen upon the terms of our own national compact. There is a constitutional obligation binding upon us, about which the feelings and interests of those who are parties to it are now in sharp conflict. We are bound by a bond, one of the terms of which is discredited by the sentiments of humanity and the principles of righteousness recognized by one of these parties; while, at the same time, the pride and interest and circumstances of the other party prompt them to a tenacious exaction of it.

Most of us can and do take but a moderate interest in politics. Many of us have a great distaste to it, and would like to spend all our days in ignorance and silence about it. Our ideal of a good government, of the sort of government we should like to live under, and of the way in which we should be glad to have things go on, is one that is fashioned by our wishes, and takes no account of practical difficulties. All the most important nominations to office, and measures of government, among us, originate with a few persons who propose themselves for these

responsibilities ; and the decisions and elections, in every case, are made by less than half the legal voters of the land. Officials, from the highest to the lowest stations among us, are chosen by minorities ; partly because many of us are wholly indifferent about voting at all, and partly because there is so little room for choice among the candidates proposed, that we are as ready to submit to one as to another of them, but do not wish to be responsible in any way for either. It probably is not strictly true, as is very often asserted both here and abroad, that the wisest and best and ablest and most competent and most honest men among us all keep out of politics, refuse office, and even waive their rights as electors at the polls. On the contrary, there is probably a fair average of all the intelligence and virtue of our citizens represented and possessed by those who fill our various political offices and manage public affairs. But there ought to be more than an average of our intelligence and integrity in these places of great trust, at the springs of our public life. The large numbers of wise and modest and upright men, who refuse to concern themselves with public affairs, are needed, with all their now unused influence, to give a predominance to the wisdom and rectitude of our councils. It is observable, that, the more narrow and retired the sphere of public duty, the more faithfully is it filled ; while, as we rise to the higher and more public places of office among us, the more indifference, carelessness, and corruption do we encounter. In the many thousand towns and cities of our land, in quiet

country villages and rural municipalities, there are faithful and wholly unrewarded officials, — treasurers, trustees, selectmen, and overseers, — of all grades and of all work, who do every year an untold amount of hard labor for others, and do it all well; serving their fellow-men at their own cost, ungrudgingly; bringing common sense, industry, and integrity to bear in ways which secure and guard the thrift and the happiness of millions. These are the public men of private life; and the less politics interferes with them or with their offices, the better is it for all of us. The moment party political issues work themselves into these quiet scenes, where there is really no party question at issue, then the integrity of all office-holders is impaired; we have to fall back upon a lower grade of public men; we select poorer candidates; and we bring into private life, and once friendly neighborhoods, animosities of the most imbittering character. But, as we rise to higher and more public offices, — those which take men from their own homes and neighborhoods and joint interests in town or village, and carry them into great halls of legislation, — we seem to miss in them more or less of the simple, homely, straightforward qualities of the selectmen of our town-governments, and to discover in them the arts and wiles of politicians. They become schemers, calculators: the cunning ones among them use the pliant ones. We may read all the debates, and count all the votes, and think we understand exactly how things are managed, — all fair upon the face of them. But, by and by, — a few years, it may be, after, or

perhaps not till a generation has passed, — there comes out a “secret history of legislation ;” and we find that a rogue or an intriguer behind the scenes was artfully directing, for ends of his own, some public measure. There are influences and excitements attending official service in high places, which are almost irresistibly deteriorating in their effect upon character. While motives of the loftiest and purest sort have their scope and trial on that field, thrilling the soul of the patriot and controlling the heart of the good man, there are abounding means and temptations for evil. The necessity of conciliating, or keeping terms with, all sorts of persons, and of dealing with their prejudices and interests, tends to impair the sincerity and the independence of their representative. The wear of body and of mind, the exhaustions of debate, the irregularity of habits, and separation from the restraints of home, lead to or aggravate a dependence on stimulants. A politician who has served through an extended public life without truckling to meanness, or compromising his manhood, or sacrificing his bodily vigor through sensual excesses, has resisted a greater variety of stronger temptations than are offered together in their full force, and without balancing securities, in any other sphere of human life. And if, as we have reason to believe, the sterling integrity and scrupulousness of public men become steadily impaired or qualified exactly as we go up from retired municipal trusts to higher scenes and offices of political service, we should expect that corruption would

culminate in public life at the seat of our national government. And, sad as it is to allow it, there is reason to think that such is the fact. So, at least, we are told; so, some of us dread to think we have some cause to believe.

Those who remember the story of the life of Martin Luther may recall the account, given in his own words, of an incident early in his career, which perhaps gave the first impulse, as it certainly did the lifelong energy, to his assault upon the corruptions of the Church of Rome. It was while he was still a young monk, burning with zeal, and with unhalting, implicit allegiance and devotion to the church, that he was sent on some mission of his order to Rome. He has recorded the pious glow and fervor of heart, the intensely kindled joy and hope, with which he anticipated his entrance to the Holy City. As he approached nearer and nearer, his ardor and devotion burned with a fire which lifted him into an ecstasy of expectation. He threw himself down to kiss the earth, oftener and oftener, as he came toward the shrine of his faith. He looked to find in that centre — that living, beating heart of the world's high church of the Lord Jesus — all that was radiant in beauty, all that was lovely in purity, all that was awe-inspiring and intralling in the sway of a meek and lofty piety. Bitterly — oh, how bitterly! — did the delusion break upon his soul; and what a rage of horror and dread convulsed his heart! He saw around him a mockery and an offence, — idolatry, covetousness, and blasphemy; and there the blade which he afterwards wielded

for God's truth and Christ's church was tempered and sharpened.

Is it not often with hopes and thoughts thus raised, to be in like manner dashed and saddened, that thousands of our own citizens from Northern homes, or visionary strangers from the old lands of oppression and corruption, visit our own capital city, Washington, — a place called by the noblest and most revered name ever borne by a man, but which, as yet, has added no lustre to that name? What might we look to find in visiting that centre of our nation's life and counsels? The picked and chosen men from our great federation of States (a few hundreds) are there; men supposed to be fitting representatives of the millions of both sexes, and of every age in our land; men generously, comfortably, and honorably cared for, with momentous interests committed to them, and with opportunity to do all that God and man require of them by simple wisdom and integrity. Wise and good men there are among them, — patriots, statesmen, Christians. God forbid that we should doubt it! But that good heaven does not work through the lump, nor give character to Congress, nor stamp its unmistakable influence upon the life and deeds of our public men. Who that has witnessed the undignified looks and doings of those high functionaries, and marked their noise and brawls, and seen how many of them are imbruted by licentiousness and drunkenness, armed with deadly weapons and ready to use them, — who that has known of and seen these things has not turned away from them with grief that it

should be so, and with dread of what may come from it all? And when we learn what things have to be tolerated and winked at, and what concessions of principle and integrity have to be made for ends of party and of policy, how vain it is for us to ask, *Why* this needs be so? The fact that it is so would hardly be cheered by having any particular reason assigned for it. What sin of any sort or kind in this world is either explained or relieved by being, as we say, accounted for? All that we can offer in explanation of the corruptions of party politics and public life among us is in simply saying, that such corruption is the form which common human frailty assumes in that particular sphere of life which we call politics. But while there is little comfort found in trying to account for the fact that party spirit and human passions may culminate in their most deplorable influence at the centre of our government, our true practical wisdom lies in recognizing the fact, and in forming our opinions, expectations, and measures in reference to it. The truth is, we overrate the intelligence and the moral strength of men in the mass, in all our communities. We judge men by an ideal standard which they by no means reach. What we need is practical good sense, and moderation of spirit, alike in our public men and in our judgment of our public men. We need a tempered tone of discussion, comprehensiveness of view, and a large allowance for conflicting interests, in matters which concern millions of human beings, mixed and influenced as they are. Our eminently good and kind-hearted men — Christians, idealists, reformers,

peace men, and philanthropists — do excellent service in forming and announcing better theories of society, and beautiful schemes of liberty, righteousness, and love, as applied to the heterogeneous elements which make up the human race. But our wise and shrewd men, calculating, conciliatory, compromising, are none the less needed to administer from year to year in the joint interests, the rival claims, and the sharp animosities, of a nation's politics. We must take things as they are, and we must take men as they are, in this world. They present themselves to statesmen and magistrates as the subjects of a government; but that government must be adjusted and administered with reference to the actual material and the actual capacity of a community of human beings. We cannot draw upon our visions of what might be and of what ought to be, any further than we can turn the ideal into the practical by steady processes of improvement. Whoever has witnessed the fury of an impassioned mob realizes the necessity of laws and of weapons which may sleep so quietly as to be well-nigh forgotten, though they must not be allowed to lose their vitality. Whoever has traced the progress of a single popular delusion, or been equally amazed and amused by the success of some medical nostrum, can appreciate more fairly the average intelligence of our own community, for instance, than can another who has read all the reports of our Board of Education, and analyzed the various tables which illustrate them. Once a year, the orators and preachers of the Peace Society stand up, and plead unanswerably for their

sacred cause, as they prove the folly, the sin, and the evil of war. But none the less, year after year, do the cabinet-ministers of courts and republics, sitting around their council-tables, find it necessary to discuss the merits of new and more destructive cannons and rifles, and to send so many regiments here or there where they are wanted. As between theorizers and practical men, we may allow the former to rule in our wishes; but we must trust the latter with our real work. When the French Minister of State, Cardinal Richelieu (a wonderfully sagacious man), and Father Joseph, a visionary man, were once planning a campaign, they spread before themselves a rough outline or map of an extended region of half-wild, half-cultivated territory, which their army would have to traverse. Father Joseph, placing his finger at a point in the course of a wide and deep river, said, "The baggage, ordnance, and ammunition will cross here." — "You forget," interrupted the cardinal, — "you forget that your finger is not a bridge." We may imagine bridges over wide and deep rivers; but it is very difficult to get heavy things over such structures. We may imagine bridges where we cannot even build them. The theory of perfectionism will not work in our Congress during our day. Besides, we must remember, that if many of the representative politicians of the nation there gathered are men of a low standard of morals, conduct, and principles, they represent constituencies just like themselves. They stand before us to signify of what mixed elements the separate sovereignties of a nation like ours is made

up. Gamblers and drunkards and brawlers, passionate, tyrannical, and self-willed men, in Congress, are only specimens of classes of people who have to be protected and governed and dealt by, not theoretically, but with all possible practical wisdom.

Again: we are to consider that our own republic is composed of elements of the most heterogeneous character, — of men historically, traditionally, socially, and politically quite unlike from the first; and that circumstances have greatly aggravated and intensified some strifes and jarring interests which existed from the first among them. There are matters of difference between us which involve some of the very highest and some of the very lowest principles and motives which have equal power with men, and which range all the way between conscience and the pocket, between pure righteousness and sordid meanness. It is certainly to be expected, that, in the strife of conflicting interests, there would be some questions, even of right and wrong, which have two sides to them, and where those who have the abstract right on their side must temporize with an established wrong. All such issues as that which now confronts our nation will practically have two sides to them, because there are two parties to them. There is on record one story of ancient wrong, which we might suppose could have but one side to it, one version of it; viz., that Cain killed Abel. But there is actually in existence among the mountain-fastnesses of Eastern Asia a tribe of men who tell this story precisely in the other way. They claim to be the descendants of Cain; and their

traditions insist that Abel was the wrong-doer, and that, though he did not kill Cain, he drove him away from home, and seized upon his inheritance. If that story has two sides to it, what party strife in all past or present time shall be considered as so wholly one-sided as not to need conciliation?

A rule of wisdom, well approved by time and honored authorities, assures us, that, before we on one side can enlighten or win over an opponent on the other side of an issue where the abstract and absolute right is complicated or disregarded because selfish interests are hazarded by it, we must first master his position. We must see his cause in the aspects and bearings in which it shows itself to him. Many of our most earnest reformers visit the sharpest severity of their censure, not upon the actual supporters of the sins and wrongs which they denounce, but upon friends and neighbors at their own sides who accord heartily with them in sentiment, but differ more or less widely with them in judgment. These uncharitable judges of their brethren take for granted, that every unprejudiced and sincere person must hold their view as to the methods and measures which alone can gain a desired object; and then they infer that any dissent from them, however quiet its manifestation, is a token of some weak or base complicity with iniquity. But a slight difference of theory or judgment between parties, and the divisions of parties, in a complicated and embittered issue, may result in a very sharp antagonism, when consistently followed out into practical measures.

It is often found to be true, that those subjects which, when discussed in some one of their bearings, partially, on one side, or, as they relate to local and temporary interests, are agitating and imbittering, may be treated calmly and much more wisely when we deal with them in their broadest relations. Thus it is, that what are the petty strifes of religious controversy, provoking passion and animosity, are divested of what is so odious and irritating, only by enlarging them as the themes for thorough and deliberate discussion. Thus, too, social schemes and theories concerning communism and reform and socialism are always wild and mischievous when advanced by ignorant, excited, or one-sided men; while they always yield some wise and beneficent results when treated by men of comprehensive views, of generous and well-trained minds. And the same will doubtless prove to be true of that subject of slavery which is so passionately discussed among us; one party treating it from a moral point of view, the other party regarding it as it is connected with their pecuniary interests, their pride of feeling, and their political rights. The fanatics and the mischief-makers on both sides of our present strife (and there are not more than a dozen of them, all told, known by name), deal with the subject only with reference to parts and portions of its wide and broad relations. There are some very able volumes, which have been produced within the last few years, dealing with the subject of negro slavery as it exists in some of our States and elsewhere. A few of these books are written in a tempered and candid spirit,

making no concession on the score of policy or expediency to the gigantic iniquity with which they deal, but presenting the facts connected with its existence with such a painful cogency to the mind of an intelligent and unimpassioned reader, as to satisfy him that those who officially must legislate or act about slavery, whether to remove it or to defend it, must have regard to some other of its relations than those of right and wrong. Within the last half-score of years, too, elaborate and most positive defences of slavery have been written and published, arguing for it as right in itself, as designed of God, as authorized by the Bible ; as a humane, a politic, and a benevolent institution. Fifty years ago, doubtless, the grandparents of the authors of these arguments would not have hesitated to protest that no such books could be written. But the whole subject, treated so thoroughly in our literature, is treated superficially in popular harangues ; the opponents and the supporters of slavery recognizing for the most part only one side of the actual issue. The moral wrong of slavery, and the consequent iniquities, dangers, and evils involved in it, fill the vision of one party among us so completely as to exclude a sufficient regard to the practical and political measures which are alike connected with its existence and its removal. The positive and unanswerable facts, that slavery has a legal and constitutional existence ; that it has planted and strengthened itself among the very largest social, civil, and pecuniary interests of millions of persons, — these hard and unyielding facts bring moral considerations into con-

flict with political relations ; and nothing will appease the strife, except views and measures which recognize all its bearings and all its elements. Those whose enormous pecuniary interests, whose sectional pride, and whose constitutional rights, are, as they think, most wrongly trifled with and insulted in this issue between us, even if they have no real positive grievances, have reason to fear them. Their interests and pride are identified with an institution which the conscience, the judgment, and the wise policy, of the whole civilized world condemn, and which, as an enormous wrong, can produce only a preponderance of evil and mischief. That is a moral sentence which is indisputable and irrevocable. But it does not meet or satisfy the practical bearings, the matter-of-fact relations, of the issue with which our nation has to deal. If we have the curiosity and the patience and the tolerance to examine all the large and comprehensive bearings of the subject of slavery as treated in modern discussions of it, we shall find that the subject covers questions opened in the whole field of human interest and duty, and takes in all the broadest concerns of our race. The subject, in its fullest discussions, embraces scientific, moral, political, and economical inquiries ; and then, as a matter of legislation, and of conflicting convictions, and of enormous pecuniary interest, it gathers around it the intensest heats and passions of party and sectional strife. It is curious to observe, likewise, how some of the scientific theorizing on the creation of man and the question of races, which would grievously offend if regarded only in its relation to a

religious creed, is gladly welcomed by those who would have a divine as well as a human basis for the enslavement of one race of men by another.

The profoundest inquirers into the secrets of natural science and the phenomena of life on this globe are engaged upon the question, whether all the human beings on the earth sprang from one and the same original pair. The question is, whether what we call the races or types of men which are now so strikingly unlike have reached to these varieties of color, constitution, capacity, and form, by the influences of climate, latitude, food, mode of life, and other natural agencies; or were from the first created, not in one pair, but by several pairs, with all their varieties organic in their respective stocks. So far, we have a purely scientific question. Are the white and black and copper-colored and red men now on the earth all alike the descendants of one Adam and one Eve, who might have been of either of these four colors? or were there as many centres and sources of origin for all human tribes, as many original Adams and Eves on different continents and islands, as there are of distinctly marked races in the present forms of humanity? Science is to deal with that question as calmly and impassionately as if it were studying the natural history of animals or fishes. Science has its own methods for doing this. It studies languages, and asks if all of them can be traced back to one. It studies the paintings and sculptures of old Egypt and Assyria and Nubia to see if the human form had several thousand years ago the same outlines

and features which it has now. It searches after antediluvian human bones to measure them, and to decide whether men were giants or pygmies in those days. Science is working hard to fashion and to stand up for its own theories. Our own Agassiz, who has the repute of unrivalled eminence in those fields of science, has repeatedly announced, as the result of his own investigations, the necessity of recognizing a plurality in the centres and sources of the original stock of humanity on the earth.*

But, while natural philosophers are studying this question of human races as a purely scientific one, it is taken up by another class of persons as a matter of very serious moral bearings; and another issue comes, in this form: Are all the races of human beings on a level? Does the possession of the human frame and features put all, who have them, on an equality? Are black men as much human beings as white men? Are they entitled to all the rights of men? or has God made them an inferior, dependent, and subject race, fitted only for a servile lot, owing service to a nobler race of white men? In their home, in Africa, they are wretched and cruel, and scarcely human. Is the enslaving of them a providential

* This modern scientific theory of the plurality of the sources of the human stock, adopted by the most eminent philosophers from evidence satisfactory to them, does not lack receivers among the most devout adherents to the authority of Scripture. It is argued that the theory is not inconsistent with any passages in the Bible, while it relieves and explains some difficulties found in it. The theory accounts for the existence of those whom Cain, the exile, feared might kill him, and for those who might help him to build and occupy a city. Moreover, the theory provides Cain with a wife other than his sister,—a relationship forbidden by the law of Moses (Lev. xviii. 9), and referred to before the promulgation of the law, as an abomination by which former occupants defiled the land, and for which God abhorred them (Lev. xviii. 27, and xx. 23).

method of benefiting them? There may be a long leap made from the conclusion, if established by science, of the original creation of human beings by distinctions of race, to the inference, that either one of these races may assert and exercise a mastery over any other of them; but it would have been strange had not the theory been turned to the defence of a dominancy of white men over black men, for which the self-interest of the stronger party would naturally be glad to find a providential warrant anticipating the human assertion of it.

This question of races, of the providential and actual relations between them as all in one sense human beings, but as not all equal in the destinies to which they are born and in the capacities with which they are furnished, underlies, as a profoundly interesting moral question, the whole subject of the relations between the weak and the powerful of God's children. It has already had one practical solution, and is yet to have another on this continent, where we are living in such abounding prosperity. One of these races of men,—the red men,—the original roamers over these scenes of earth, have wasted away before the advancing tread of the white men. They were too wildly noble in their savage instincts to be degraded into slaves; they were too wayward and restless in the fibre and tissue of their organism to submit to the restraints of civilization; and so they have perished. We make romances and poems about them, now that they have vanished. But existence, under the conditions which alone was congenial with their nature, seemed

possible to them only when they were alone on this soil. Over the record of their barbarities, and the wrongs of the white men toward them, we discuss, and, to the satisfaction of some, settle the issue, — that, when two races of men are brought together upon the same region of the earth, the race that is weaker in the gifts and culture of the mind, even though it be stronger in the muscles and sinews of the body, must either serve as slaves, or perish as victims. Utter extinction has proved, of these two alternatives, to be the destined fate of the red men; and enslavement has been claimed to be the necessary and legitimate destiny of the black men. It was under the accepted belief of this opinion, as ratified by the Jewish Scriptures, by experience, and the constitution of things, though not as yet leaning upon the modern theory of an original plurality of the human stock, that negro slavery was first introduced upon our continent. But while that was an accepted and prevailing opinion, there were, from the first, wise and good persons, scrupulous and conscientious individuals, here and there, who doubted it, and, by a long foresight or misgiving, dreaded the retribution which slavery would at some distant time inflict. If these doubters objected, they were not heeded, nor even heard. The whole force of opinion was the other way. The great Methodist preacher, Whitefield, pleaded strongly for the introduction of slavery into the Colony of Georgia; and it came in solely and entirely through his agency. The general approbation of slavery as a divine ordinance might have been shaken at the date when we took

our place among the nations of the earth ; but it was still tolerated as a necessary evil, or as the condition of a predominant and ultimate good. The Constitution, the organic law of our nation, recognizes the rights of slaveholders in slave property. And, as any such distinct and positive an element in our compact would be but a nullity if restricted to a merely literal assertion, the right recognized carries with it the pledge of all needful measures for enforcing it ; and, indeed, makes all the parties to the compact joint agents for carrying those measures into effect. After the prostration of the authority of the former government over these Colonies, and the realizing of their asserted independence, it seemed as if, with our old traditional and historical alienations reviving, our rivalry of interests, the hostilities and feuds engendered by a long strife, the elements of party animosity already working, our shattered fortunes, and our paper securities for a crushing debt, — it seemed as if we should be made to discover that our only bond of amity was in our enmity to the foreign foe ; and that, soon falling by the ears, we should do each other infinitely more harm than we should have suffered from those whom we had resisted. And why did we not ? What averted the dreaded series of possible calamities ? It was the federation of the States by terms which yielded some, and retained others, of the rights of separate sovereignties. Our relation to slavery, of tolerance, concession, and non-interference, is an entailed constitutional obligation, involuntary as regards those who are living here now, and therefore exclud-

ed from the range of our responsibility. The perfect ideal of a true republic came to our inheritance subject to that abatement. Our estate is encumbered with a debt, the paper evidences of which are too formal, and have been too long recorded, to allow us to raise objections because of a breach of morals between those who received the equivalent, and entered into a recognition of property in human beings.

That recognition is embraced in the solemn compact by which, to avert the horrors of anarchy and of civil war and to secure the blessings of a Union, we entered into a confederation. We could not have escaped the evils dreaded, nor secured the blessings desired, on any other terms than those which the statesmen and the people of those days ratified, and gladly ratified. The great instrument to which they gave force has realized to us an immeasurable sum of good. One of the terms of the compact — that which requires of the citizens of all the States to recognize the local legality of slavery in any State which establishes it in the exercise of its reserved sovereignty, by aiding in the rendition of fugitives from slavery — casts a dark shade over the glory of our whole Constitution, as freemen would now love to boast of it as a perfect scheme of government. We are held to the terms of the compact, and to that one among them all which seems to us to be but a Shylock's bargain. Time and experience and rival interests have greatly altered the views and the relations of the two parties which now exist in reference to that article in our joint covenant. Indeed, we may say that

these two parties have been created and defined solely by a change of opinions and a growth of rival interests in connection with the primary and the inferential obligations and rights recognized in that article.

We plead on our side, in these Free States, that it could not have entered into the views of the framers of our Constitution, that slavery should be a perpetual, a strengthening, and a dominant influence in this republic of freemen ; but that they expected it to yield, in two or three generations, to the spirit of our institutions, and to pass away from the whole of the land, as it has done from a majority of the States which were the only original members of the republic. We insist that slavery was legalized only where it then existed ; but that, as it has ever since been claiming new territory, and has found it to be essential to its life that it should enlist the dignity and the patronage and the countenance of the General Government to its direct or indirect support, it cannot be excluded from debate in our councils, and, when it enters there, must provoke strife. We urge, too, that time and experience, and the progress of all humane and righteous principles among men, demand and justify a moral assault upon slavery ; that our pride and our consciences are wounded by any active, and even by any quiescent, partnership of our own in the interest of that institution ; and that we wish so resolutely to stand free of incurring any responsibility for it, that we are naturally kept watchful and suspicious of all political intriguers who are in its interests. This is our side of the case now at issue.

In the mean while, as we have been ridding our own States of slavery, and have been brought and educated to see its evil and mischief, and to hate it as an outrage to humanity, the other party to our common compact have been brought, by the circumstances under which they have lived, to look kindly and approvingly on slavery, — to love it, to depend upon it, to identify with it their property, their pride, and their civil rights, and to vindicate it as of the very purpose and sanction of God. As slavery has grown more and more hateful to us, it has become more and more tolerable and righteous and desirable and profitable to them. There is no denying this fact; and practical wisdom demands that we deal with it magnanimously and candidly as a fact. They hear their religious teachers defend slavery, from what they believe to be the Word of God. They grow up from childhood under its influence as a patriarchal institution. They insist that the same Providence which gave them their peculiar soil, fit only for particular crops, has also given them negroes as the only proper laborers. They hold to that theory of the races which makes the weaker the rightful servants of the stronger. They contend that humanity and charity sanction the institution, and that it is their solemn duty as well as their right to maintain it. They put their finger upon the letter of the solemn national compact, and argue that a fair inference from it justifies them in asking even more than it expressly secures to them. And this is their side of the case.

And their side pleads with us by additional ap-

peals, which must have weight with kindly and considerate natures. That side is the weaker one in reason, in morality, in absolute justice, and in all physical and substantial resources ; and they know it to be the weaker side in all these respects. Therefore the burden of charity and conciliation should be with us. We must not wrong white men for the sake of righting black men. I see not how any persons among us can mock over and ridicule their present alarm and wild threats. To my mind, there is something profoundly provocative of sympathy in the furious and reckless excitement under which they rage, and boast of what they never can fulfil. This excess of courage indicates the desperation of a harrowing fear. They know that their chief and only danger — and that an appalling one — is from an insurrection or outbreak among their own slaves. How unwise, then, is the recklessness and severity of speech, the inflammatory invective, and the rage-provoking bitterness, of some of our public speakers, who think the numbers of the crowds that listen to them certify to the wholesomeness of their one-sided harangues !

Such is the condition of public affairs under which our chief magistrate invites us to give thanks for “the preservation of the States united.” We pray that they may still remain so ; and, for the sake of it, we will do and suffer any thing short of making barter or sacrifice of truth or righteousness. Let us be faithful to our compact till we can alter its terms. Let us remember, that among the old Hebrew sen-

tences of the Psalmist, describing the man whom God approves, is this: "He who sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not." But, if the crisis of affairs is really upon us, — of which, however, for myself, I see no sufficient evidence, — let us meet it with true hearts. There are sacred traditions and living convictions of our own, too, — wrought in with our local history, and quickening the pulses of the citizens of our own Commonwealth, — to which we must be faithful. Our nation, as a nation, is pledged to freedom. Our institutions are fashioned for freemen. Our prosperity cannot, in the long-run, consist with any unrighteousness. We have no right of interference with slavery where it now exists; and, therefore, we are morally and politically free of all responsibility for it. If we are called upon in any way, direct or indirect, to patronize, support, or extend it, our own loyalty to freedom and righteousness will demand that we refuse to do so, even at the risk of dismembering, or of suffering the dismemberment of, our republic. At the point at which our actual responsibility for slavery would begin, we have rights as freemen, which we have never parted with, and which we shall guard and exercise that we may remain freemen. There should be practical wisdom and statesmanship among us — perhaps they are reserved among that other half of our electors who are not seen at the polls — to find and follow the path of rectitude and safety in this sharp issue.

From these distracting strifes in public affairs, we turn, with a sense of relief, to the household joys

and blessings of this grateful festival. It seems sad and strange to admit or to fear, amid such abounding means of good scattered through uncounted homes, cheering unnumbered hearts, this day, that the passions or the rival interests of a few violent men on either side should put such a sum of happiness at risk. No: we will regard our common blessings as so precious and diffused as to insure themselves. We will regard those men as public enemies, who, by flippant or reckless speech, imbitter our present differences. We will wait in confidence, that, before any real trouble breaks upon us, wise and good men who now keep silence, while the turbulent and the angry alone are heard, will calm the storm. Above all, we will trust still in the providential care of that Divine Husbandman, who planted in the wilderness the vine which has nourished and sheltered us. Its roots are invigorated by the waters of two oceans; its boughs spread over the land. Sprigs and fruit from its luxurious growth are waiting us at our tables now. May all the fruits which it bears be healthful, and its protection be a blessing to all the children of God whom it overshadows!



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